ART FOR EVERYONE

—

PLATFORMIZATION OF CULTURAL WORK AND COOPERATIVISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE

A Report by

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About the Institute for Digital Cooperative Economy

The Institute for the Cooperative Digital Economy (ICDE) is the research division of the Platform Cooperativism Consortium. Established in 2019, its research covers the emerging cooperative digital economy, which is a relatively unexplored domain in fields like anthropology, political science, sociology, history, law, and economics. The cooperative digital economy is rapidly expanding and is closely linked to labor and cooperative studies. The ICDE's work also focuses on finance, entrepreneurship, and organizational studies in business schools, as well as governance and corporate structure, which are critical subjects in law schools.

At the ICDE, we recognize that scholars, technologists, artists, community organizers, and cooperators equally contribute valuable insights to the development of a more just and equitable digital economy. Therefore, the Institute's mission is to provide applied and theoretical knowledge, education, and policy analysis to bridge the research gaps in the emerging cooperative digital economy. Learn more at https://platform.coop

1.
INTRODUCTION

A new business model began to become dominant in the second decade of the 21st century. Based on the idea of a corporate sharing economy, companies began to develop digital platforms that linked property owners or service providers to potential users. In a few years, this model ceased to represent a specific segment of the economy and has become the paradigm of contemporary labor relations.

This new model is understood by Nick Srnicek (2016) as a new phase form of capitalism called "Platform Capitalism." Platforms are defined by Srnicek as digital infrastructures that mediate the interaction between two or more groups. With that, they have proven to be an efficient way to extract, analyze and generate value from the gigantic volume of data generated in human interactions. Therefore, it is not only a new technological phase but platformization materializes a new stage of production relations.

Among the various sectors where Platform Capitalism has been consolidating is that of culture. Due to the monopolistic tendency of platforms, producers of cultural goods are forced to make their works available on platforms in order to make them accessible to the public and monetize their consumption. By doing so, artists find themselves dependent on platforms, receiving a tiny part of the revenue generated by their works, controlled by algorithms that are not transparent, and having to adapt their production in the search for optimizing their performance on the platforms.

Faced with the growing platformization of the economy, Trebor Scholz developed (2016) the concept of Platform Cooperativism in mid-2015. Since then, the concept continues to be debated from different angles in events and publications. In addition to its theoretical implications, it has been spreading around the world and inspiring concrete projects in several segments.

The proposal seeks to reinvent the traditional cooperative model of work through a collective appropriation of digital platforms. To this end, it proposes the creation of platforms that are managed and owned by the workers themselves, and not mediated by large corporations. In this way, they can have control over the entire process of production and circulation, based on democratic decisions and achieving a more egalitarian distribution of income.

These platform co-ops have already entered the creative economy and promise to revolutionize the life of artists—giving them more power over

their means of creation and their creations themselves. They're not only good-intentioned ideas, they actually have genial monetization models, innovative governance structures and advanced technologies.

However, platform cooperativism is not yet a dominant discourse; most people don't even know about their existence or imagine that such alternatives are possible. How many of them exist? In which countries are they located? Are there sub-categories amongst them? These are some of the leading questions of this investigation.

In order to investigate the concrete possibilities and limits of platform cooperativism for cultural work, we analyzed digital cooperatives in the cultural sector in the world. For that purpose, we searched them on the main platform co-ops databases in order to map the existing projects[12]. Based on the results, we presented some insights about their characteristics, patterns and roles.

Given this context and focus, we seek to answer the following research problem: what are the possibilities and limits of platform cooperativism for cultural workers? As a hypothesis, we maintain that such a proposal constitutes a sustainable alternative for a fairer and more democratic organization of workers in the cultural sector.

The present research, developed throughout 2022 during my Fellowship in the Institute of the Cooperative Digital Economy (ICDE) of the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC) at The New School has the general objective of identifying the possibilities and limits of platform cooperativism for cultural work. Specifically, to theorize and analyze the effects of platformization the economy in the culture sector; to identify possible connections between platform cooperativism and the movement for free culture; and to empirically analyze digital cooperatives in the cultural sector.

With this work, we aim to foster the imagination of cultural workers, art consumers and platform co-ops enthusiasts to visualize a world where art is produced and circulated in a cooperative, common and free manner. We aim to offer concrete examples on how to do this, based on experiences from people around the world that are trying to make this a reality.

2.

METHODOLOGY

The enthusiasm around the libertarian utopias that surrounded the first years following the invention of the Internet was contained after its increasing domination by large corporations. In recent years, however, alternative forms of its appropriation have begun to resurface, leading people to believe that the democratic potential of the network and the free sharing of culture can still be realized. One of the ways in which this project has materialized is through platform cooperativism, a proposition of appropriation of digital platforms based on the cooperative conception of work.

This proposal has shown increasing relevance both in theoretical debates about work in the digital age, and in the inspiration of real workers' projects. However, its debate remains concentrated in the northern region of the globe and there is a lack of empirical research that observes the concrete dynamics of digital cooperatives, which offers the possibility of a contribution that brings perspective from the global south and presents an empirical analysis that fosters the discussions on the subject by indicating its possibilities and limits.

In order to analyze digital cooperatives in the cultural sector, we develop research that will be organized according to the following method. First, in the bibliographical phase, we carry out a literature review in order to understand and put into dialogue the theorizations around the role of digital platforms in the current production regime, with a focus on the creative economy sector .

To do so, we start from the concept of 'Platform Capitalism,' as presented by Nick Srnicek (2016), in order to understand the characteristics of this business model that expands worldwide, becoming the predominant paradigm in the current economy. If platformization is a broad and comprehensive phenomenon, its effects on specific segments have particularities. Therefore, in order to capture them, we will refer to the work of Thomas Poell and David Nieborg, with emphasis on the book "The platformization of cultural production" (2021).

To present the concept of platform cooperativism, we will rely on the book "Platform Cooperativism: Challenging the Corporate Sharing Economy" (2016) by Trebor Scholz, the movement's founding book. In order to place the concept in the Brazilian context, we will take the report "Platform Cooperativism in Brazil: Dualities, Dialogues and Opportunities" (2022), wrote by Rafael Zanatta and published by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC) with the support of the Institute for Technology and Society (ITS Rio). To highlight the contradictions of platform cooperativism, especially

in cultural work, we will base ourselves on the articles by Marisol Sandoval (2018; 2019) and Rafael Grohmann (2018; 2022). As input for discussions around free culture, we will appropriate the historical overview of the movement carried out by Leonardo Foletto in "Culture is Free: A History of Anti-Property Resistance" (2020).

As it is a fairly recent phenomenon, the next step seeks to map the so-called cooperative projects, which are based on digital platforms for their operation and which fit into the cultural market. This step will allow identifying these cooperatives in order to discover their quantity, scope and geographic distribution. With this, we will be able to select the projects that will be analyzed in more depth in the next phase.

Cooperatives in the cultural sector will be understood as those that develop works related to design, music, photography, audiovisual and graphic arts as one of their main activities. To identify them, we will use the two main databases on the topic – the Platform Coop Directory[3], from the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC), and the Map of Communicators Cooperatives[4], from the Platform Cooperativism Observatory.

Then, in the second phase, we carry out a multiple case study with cooperatives selected from the initial mapping. We selected 3 cooperatives for a deeper analysis, using regional diversity, time of existence, difference in areas and organizational size as selection criteria. This phase consists of an examination of the presentation texts of the platforms' websites, aiming to clarify the understanding of their practices and identify the main potentials and challenges of this model. Thus, the justification and originality of this report lies in proposing an analysis of alternative forms of work organization in digital capitalism based on a recent but increasingly relevant concept, which is still little explored in the region and still does not present significant empirical investigations. The sustained hypothesis is that platform cooperatives are effective means of building a creative economy based in the commons through a collective (re)appropriation of digital platforms.

3.

THE PLATFORMIZATION OF EVERYTHING

Platformization has been consolidated both as a general trend for work in the 21st century in the most diverse sectors of society, and as a transdisciplinary field of research. This is justified by the fact that digital platforms are increasingly consolidated as the basic infrastructure of society, intermediating human relationships and access to public and private goods and services. More specifically for our interest in this work, we observe the increasing number of individuals who work directly or indirectly through the platforms. Thus, in order to understand the reality of work in the present and future, it is necessary to investigate its logic and its influences on the labor dimension.

Despite its development in recent years, this trend has accelerated in the last years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing and economic instability have driven platformization, which has on the one hand, increased the supply of work on platforms, and on the other, increased the demand for goods and services through them. Even traditional work dynamics, which operated outside platforms, found themselves migrating to them.

However, the dissemination of a technology does not occur in a vacuum—it influences and is influenced by factors external to it. According to Grohmann (2020), the phenomenon of platformization should be understood as the imbrication between three factors: financialization, datafication, and neoliberal rationality.

First, it involves a gradual conversion of all values into financial figures, i.e. making the monetary value override all other priorities. Second, it concerns the growing presence of data in everyday life and its valorization as a commodity in the capitalist mode of production. Finally, it consolidates a rationality dictated by economic transactions with the sole objective of capital appreciation. In this way, it highlights a process that is at the same time technological, financial and political; without which the understanding of platformization would fall into reductionism.

Platforms advent is the result of neoliberal rationality, causing them to be designed according to the capitalist logic of private property and its use in the exploitation of workers who sell their labor in them. Thus, from their inception to their current state, the motivation behind the platforms has been exclusively capital appreciation.

In addition to their productive dimension, Grohmann (2021) understands platforms as a means of communication at the same time. In his words,

The platformization of work means not only dependence on digital infrastructures and their affordances, but also the growing role of communication as an organizer of work processes. (Grohmann 2021, 173)

One of the first authors to theorize about the production regime centered on digital platforms was Nick Srnicek, in the book Platform Capitalism (2017). In hisview, we are facing the rise of a new phase of capitalism, whose main characteristic is the economic exploitation of data. Srnicek also highlights the need for a multifocal analysis, because for him, new technologies need to be accompanied by new organizational models to materialize.

In Srnicek's definition (2017), platforms have four main characteristics: their role as mediators—constituting an infrastructure of mediation between different groups; its network effects—that is, the relationship between the number of users of a platform and its value; the use of cross-subsidies—the offering of free services with the aim of increasing the number of users and monetizing other paid services; the definition of the "rules of the game"—their control over the rules of interaction, production and circulation of value within the network.

For Van Dijk, Poell and de Wall (2018), it can be said that we have entered a new socio-technical order, the platform society. His work seeks to highlight the bases of the platforms, reaching the conclusion of three main elements: they are powered by data; organized by algorithms; managed by ownership relationships guided by business models; and governed by user agreements.

Still according to the authors, its operation is processed through the following mechanisms—datafication, commodification and selection. Thus, the dynamics of platforms can be summarized in the three steps that represent the appropriation of data, its conversion into economic value, and the selection of which products and services to offer. Given the fact that they are designed with the sole purpose of exploitation, they are criticized regarding their neglect of public values in the face of the expansion of their presence in all spheres of life in society.

In this way, the emergence of platforms is driven by the creation of a new business model that has proven to be extremely profitable. Therefore, their purpose, the algorithms that govern them, and their governance are all aimed at generating surplus, whether financial or informational. Thus,

they are not focused on human needs and are not committed to the common good.

For Trebor Scholz (2016), professor at The New School, researchers critical of platform capitalism have not realized its exploratory dimension. The platform workers themselves are aware that the promises of the so-called "corporate sharing economy" have not been fulfilled.

Thus, Scholz refers to a general trend towards the "uberization" of work (2016). The term, being a neologism derived from the urban transport platform Uber, refers to the business logic represented by the company that has spread to most markets: flexible working relationships, profit based on the intermediation of products and services (no longer in one's possession), and the use of mobile devices. As soon as large corporations began to emerge around platforms, the intermediate the supply of goods and services, some authors began to point to alternatives for a collective and democratic appropriation of these digital infrastructures. And he indicates the possibility of thinking about a new regime of Internet ownership:
No one would have believed, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, that the ideological bubble of the "sharing economy" would deflate so quickly, or that workers, labor advocates, programmers, and activists would soon start to build structures for democratic ownership and governance on the Internet (Scholz 2016, 9)

If the ideology that has permeated Silicon Valley since the rise of the first platforms promises human liberation through technology and flexibility, workers are increasingly realizing that they have actually become increasingly dependent on platforms. He concludes: "Platform capitalism is incredibly ineffective at taking care of people." (Scholz 2016, 61).

4.

THE

PLATFORMIZATION

OF CULTURAL

WORK

If the phenomenon of platformization spreads across all sectors, it must be considered that its impacts on each of them have different specificities and gradations. In this work, we chose the cultural sector for a more in-depth analysis, which is justified by the fact that historically the sector has always been marked by informality, low income and the lack of artists' control over their works.

The particularity of the cultural sector is highlighted by Marisol Sandoval (2017): the author presents the contradiction present in the cultural work, which despite having its activity socially recognized as privileged, commonly presents precarious and unstable working conditions.

If there is one main finding that can be concluded from research on work in the cultural sector, it is certainly that lives in so-called creative jobs are complex and contradictory, combining satisfaction and relatively high levels of autonomy with insecurity, low wages, anxiety and inequality. (Sandoval 2017, 112)

Therefore, the discourse on the autonomy of this sector and the prestige achieved by a few artists overshadows the reality of the mass of precarious workers. The author identifies, then, in the career of these professionals the ideal of neoliberal capitalism, since the alleged freedom of their craft makes all the responsibility fall on the individuals. This often results in anxiety, as they have few regulations and unions to count on to guarantee their rights.

The fragility of cultural workers is even more evident in times of crisis such as the recent one. If in pre-pandemic times the sector was already characterized by instability, at this moment, it shows itself as one of the most impacted sectors. According to a survey by the Institute of Applied Economics Research (IPEA) in Brazil, 48.8% of cultural agents lost 100% of their income between May and July 2020. As alternatives for exiting the crisis, the needs most pointed out by the interviewees were: access to information directed to the sector (18.69%), participation in networks/networking (17.53%), information on how to behave in the reopening (16.71%), consulting (13.88%), psychological support (1.73%), training (12.96%) and others (6.49%). It should be noted that most of the needs expressed by cultural workers are linked to connection, the formation of supportive networks and exchange of information.

If the sector is marked by contradictions, the phenomenon of platformization makes it even more complex. This is because, on the one hand,

platforms have made it easier for artists to bring their works to audiences and monetize them. But on the other hand, they end up being dependent on the platforms, which define the way in which their works will be made available and the amount to be paid for their access.

Because contingent cultural commodities are inherently platform dependent, their producers are effectively complicit in accepting economic mechanisms, managerial strategies, and governance frameworks and infrastructures that equal disproportionality, dependency, and inequality. (Nieborg and Poell 2018, 15)

For Nieborg and Poell (2018), the main effect of platformization of the cultural work is contingency—increasingly, cultural works are ephemeral and personalized according to the audience. Thus, it is the algorithms that dictate what, how and when your work will be consumed; taking that control away from the artists or users themselves.

Platformization, as this article suggests, marks the reorganization of cultural production and circulation, rendering cultural commodities contingent. This contingency poses new problems for cultural theorists and critics, who are confronted with cultural objects that resist stabilization. Unstable texts raise a wealth of methodological and cultural challenges. Instead of fixed, physical cultural commodities, digital distribution turns games and news into personalized services that differ for each individual, based on time, location, user profile, and behavior. Developers can alter content in real-time and combined with advertising-driven platforms, this has profound implications for content accessibility, accuracy, and diversity. (Nieborg and Poell 2018, 15)
In this way, cultural workers face particular challenges in the platformization of their sector. The apparent flexibility of his activity hides a precariousness that deepens with the introduction of platforms in his professional practice, distancing them from his works and leaving him at the mercy of definitions and algorithmic calculations. Without a support network or a coalition to fight for their rights, artists are left to their own devices.

5.
PLATFORM COOPERATIVES AS AN ALTERNATIVE

Faced with this scenario, are workers left to accept the inexorable platformization or is it possible to imagine another future of work? A historical perspective helps us to realize that history is contingent—if currently this trend towards virtuality of work is taking place, it also can indicate that other trends are possible. It is up to the various actors to participate together in the construction of something new. As Scholz says,

A People's Internet is possible! A coalition of designers, workers, artists, cooperatives, developers, inventive unions, labor advocates can shift structures so that everybody can reap the fruits of their own labor. (Scholz 2016, 10)

From this observation, other possible appropriations of digital technologies can begin to be imagined, which could materialize a solidarity economy, because for Scholz, there is no inevitable future of work, it is built from the positions we take in the present (SCHOLZ, 2016). He called this project 'Platform Cooperativism,' uniting the traditional work organization of work cooperatives with contemporary technologies. According to this proposal, workers can democratically develop and manage their own platforms, so that they do not depend on the intermediation of companies and keep the entire production process under their control.

Platform cooperativism is a term that describes technological, cultural, political, and social changes. Platform Cooperativism is a rectangle of hope. It's not a concrete utopia; it is an emerging economy. Some of the models that I will describe now, already exist for two or three years while others are still imaginary apps. Some are prototypes, other are experiments; all of them introduce alternative sets of values. (Scholz 2016, 14)

Then, Scholz (2017) lists ten principles that would define platform cooperatives: 1) Collective ownership; 2) Decent pay and income security; 3) Transparency and data portability; 4) Appreciation and acknowledgment; 5) Co-determined work; 6) Protective legal framework; 7) Portable worker protections and benefits 8) Protection against arbitrary behavior; 9) Rejection of excessive workplace surveillance; and 10) Right to disconnect. Such principles do not intend to define an immutable essence of what can be considered cooperative, but serve as parameters for the analysis of concrete experiences that are designated in this way.

Therefore, he proposes the creation of platforms that are collectively owned and managed by the workers themselves, and are not mediated by large corporations. In this way, they can have control over the entire production process, based on democratic decisions and achieving a more

equitable distribution of income. In this way, 'Platform Cooperativism' is pointed out as one of the ways to unite workers in the creation of new infrastructures for the consolidation of production relations based on the common good.

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Clearly, cooperativism cannot be taken as the panacea for all the problems of working on digital platforms. One of the most common criticisms of the cooperativism project is that, at a given moment in its development, the capitalist logic will infiltrate its dynamics (Sandoval, 2019). Evidently this is one of the main risks that one runs when trying to create a cooperative microenvironment within a capitalist macroenvironment. However, Scholz responds to this criticism as follows:

One common objection to cooperatives is that they are just as much bound to market pressures as any other capitalist enterprise, which make self-exploitation unavoidable. Eventually, co-ops too, can resort to the gambit of unpaid internships and uncompensated volunteers. Co-ops are exposed to the pitiless competition of the market, but in the light of the 20% to 30% profit that companies like Uber are taking as profit, one approach would be for platform cooperatives to offer their services at a lower price. They could run on 10% profit, which could then be partially translated into the social benefit for workers. Cooperatives could also flourish in niche markets, taking on low-income clients/consumers as their target groups. (Scholz 2016, 13)

In this way, we argue that platform coops can constitute an alternative to the exploitation of platform capitalism. Of course this models has his own challenges, but it is productive by fostering an imagination of a new digital economy.

6.

CULTURE BEYOND THE WALLS

Culture, once produced and enjoyed collectively as a common good, freely transmitted from generation to generation, circulates today mostly in the form of commodities. Precisely at the moment when the technical possibilities allowed culture to circulate quickly, without barriers and at low cost – it is exactly the moment when it is most limited. The lucrative potential of creating artificial scarcity was realized precisely in this time of informational abundance that is like the present. In a paraphrase of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, McKenzie Wark says the same thing about information that could be said about culture: "Information wants to be free but everywhere it sees itself in chains." (Wark 2004, 68).

The work "Culture is Free: A History of Anti-Property Resistance" (2022), by Leonardo Folleto, starts from an estrangement from the contradiction imposed by the current cultural production regime—how to deprive cultural works of circulation, if this circulation is a requirement for artistic creation? Capitalism, knowingly structured on contradictions, found ways to modulate this relationship between freedom and deprivation in order to make the process profitable.

What better way to talk about this freedom of culture, if not by demonstrating that historically, despite the various attempts to enclose it, there have always been opposing movements that advocated its freedom? That is why Foletto undertakes the challenging task of delving into the thread of history, guiding us through a panorama of events, documents and characters from antiquity to the present day. The categorical and precise statement of the title makes its position clear: culture is free, and this almost ontological characteristic, although denied from time to time, does not allow itself to be completely succumbed.

Talking about free forms of creation, use, modification, consumption, protection and reproduction of culture involves understanding the ways of producing and circulating information and culture in different historical periods. (Foletto 2020, 13)

In this sense, culture can be understood as the last limit entered by the growing process of commoditization of life. The gradual transformation of the various aspects of experience into private property began with land, passed through capital and today finds its central commodity in culture. This is because, in a process of increasing abstraction of the commodity form, one notes the incredible potential for extracting value in a parasitic co-option of culture production. Instead of needing to invest in production, it now becomes possible to capture culture, which is produced natu-

rally by the general intellect, and profit from its circulation.

Platform cooperativism, as it is a concept formulated recently and its discourse is concentrated in certain regions of the world, still lacks empirical analyses that observe its dynamics in specific markets. However, they have grown in number and scope, being present in increasingly more sectors, and adding a growing number of workers and supporters.

By contributing to the construction of alternative economic structures based on solidarity, cooperation and collective ownership, cooperatives and workers can also play a role in transforming working conditions in the cultural sector. However, like any prefigurative project, workers' co-operatives cannot fully escape the pressures of the existing system. Alternative projects in the cultural sector need to navigate complex tensions and potential conflicts between creative processes, economic necessity and political aspirations. (SANDOVAL 2017, 120)

Sandoval presents the contradiction present in the work in the area of culture, which despite having its activity socially recognized as privileged, commonly presents precarious and unstable working conditions. As a solution, she points to cooperatives as a way of offering better labor relations that give back to cultural workers the power over their activities and their results. Despite this, she emphasizes that it is not an easy task, as it involves dealing with the complex factors that characterize this market.

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7.
ARTISTS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

Platform Cooperatives, due to their complexity, present a great identification and categorization challenge. As mentioned before, we have several organizations that do not call themselves cooperatives, but present several of their characteristics. On the other hand, many projects that are called cooperatives show traces of startups or micro-enterprises.

However, there are several research efforts in order to map, classify and analyze them. The main effort is the Directory of the Platform Cooperativism Consortium, a resource that gathers information about the various initiatives around the world. The tool contains descriptive information for each platform—such as name, description, website, location, and contact. In addition to categorizing them according to their type and segment, which allows a series of analyzes regarding the presence, activity and sector of each one of them.

For our analysis, we used the Directory to search organizations categorized as "Cooperative" and classified in the art category "Art". Some results were discarded for reasons such as insufficient information, wrong sector categorization or not having any mention as a "cooperative' or its principles on their official websites. The search resulted in 15 cooperatives worldwide. In the table below, we present the main information for each of them:

TABLE 1
Platform Cooperatives of Art

Name	Subcategory	Country
1D Lab	Laboratory	France
Ampled	Platform	United States
Art.coop	Community	United States
Coopérative Samouraï	Service provider	France
Cosmos	Community	United States
DiGiDi - Cooperative Digital Distribution	Platform	Denmark
Eyemole Arts and Technology Co-operative	Service provider	Canada
Guerrilla Media Collective	Service provider	Spain
Means TV	Platform	United States
Peep.Me	Platform	United States
PicNoi	Platform	United States
RedRoot Artists Cooperative	Service provider	Philippines
Smart Coop	Consultancy/Incubator	Belgium
Snowdrift.coop	Crowdfunding	United States
Stocksy United	Platform	Canada
TAKŁADNIE	Service provider	Poland

Geography

Among the initiatives listed, the vast majority are headquartered in the global north, and its concentration in North America and Europe is evident. The country that places most of them is the United States, with 6 art cooperatives listed. It can be explained by the fact that the platform cooperativism movement started there, so it had more time to develop and has more leaderships working to spread the concept.

Results were found in many continents—America, Europe, Asia and Oceania; indicating the international tendency of the movement. Considering that the platform cooperativism was created just a few years ago, it is impressive the speed of its dissemination around the world. However, it is important to highlight that no art cooperatives were listed in Africa. With its remarkable cultural diversity and tradition of production of art, the potential of cooperativism hasn't been realized there yet.

In this way, we can point to the need for a greater geographical dispersion of cultural cooperatives, especially towards the global south. Considering its history and origin, it is natural that they're more concentrated in the north. But it is imperative to explore its potential in South America and Africa. And this should be done not by just importing models from the north, but developing models from the local needs and specificities. In these countries, artists face an even bigger challenge of making a living from their production, so the upside of the cooperative model for them is even greater.

For this purpose, we highlight the role of the annual Platform Cooperativism Conference, promoted by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium. Its first edition in the global south took place in 2022[5],in Brazil in partnership with the Institute for Technology and Society (ITS). It provided evidence that diversifying the country where the conference takes place can have a great potential in the spreading of the movement towards the south. And having a local co-host also proved to be a good strategy in adapting the event to the cultural specificities where the concept is developing. This edition of the event got more than 300 participants and most of them from Brazil, demonstrating that platform cooperativism attends to the needs of the global south it just needs to be better known. And the format—an in person event—proved to be ideal for this goal, since people can know the concept from concrete experiences and meeting those involved in platform cooperatives and adjacent sectors.

Sub-Categories

Even if all of them are listed as "Art cooperatives," we can identify sub-categories between them. They have different purposes, models and structures; despite all being related with cultural production. To highlight these differences, we propose the following subcategorization:

a) Community

As for their activity, it can be noted that most of them propose themselves as a community for discussion, exchange of experiences, and support between artists. As mentioned earlier, the establishment of relationships between professionals in this sector is considered one of the main needs for improving their working conditions. By forming communities in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition, artists can alleviate economic pressures and develop their talents without the sole aim of profit.

b) Service provider

Collectives of professionals that offer services like design, audiovisual production, social media management, and translation. They are similar to media agencies in terms of the services offered, but with the difference of being collectively-owned and collaboratively managed. With the cooperative model, they can have more autonomy, better compensation and recognition.

c) Platforms

These are cooperatives that function as a form of marketplace, in which artists can offer their products and services to third parties without intermediaries. The following categories—image banks, streaming and independent audiovisual production—allow artists to promote their work at a lower rate or no fee at all, providing artists with a superior transfer of income from the use of their images, in addition to participating in the

decisions of these organizations. In this way, it manages to circumvent the predatory model of Big Techs, which charge a significant part of the value obtained with the availability of works, in addition to not being subject to arbitrary decisions of the platforms that may affect them.

d) Crowdfunding

One of the main challenges for the sustainability and scalability of platform co-ops is their financing. Crowdfunding cooperatives attempt to connect projects that need resources with enthusiasts and people interested in investing in cooperatives. They provide the infrastructure for people to discover new projects and contribute financially with its development.

e) Incubator

Other cultural cooperatives have a lack of knowledge—they don't have expertise in running an organization, creating sustainable models or designing their processes. So the incubators provide consultancy to guide these cooperatives towards their development.

f) Laboratory

Art and experimentation are deeply connected—art and science have more in common that we usually imagine. The co-op laboratories play a role of being spaces of discovery and experimentation of art. In this space, cooperators are free to exercise their abilities without the pressure of the market to commodify their creative work. It provides an ideal environment for work.

These categories were formulated based on the concrete projects identified in the research. However, this list has no intention to be exhaustive—beyond these existing models, it is important to foment the creation and experimentation of new ones. It can be done by 1) Identifying artists' needs that are not being satisfied; 2) Cooperatively replicating models of

the platform capitalism; 3) Identifying demands of cultural consumers that are not being attended. To create them, we need to think like artists!

Case studies

In this section, we analyze three cases of platform coops in the arts sector—Ampled, Guerrilla Media Collective, and Art.coop. We've chosen cases from different categories (Platform, Service provider, and Community) to highlight the differences between these models. We based our analysis on the information available on their official channels (websites, social media, and others). In future research, we plan to conduct interviews with their members in order to get further data that could allow deeper investigations.

a) Ampled

Ampled is a platform where the community can directly support musicians. It positions itself as a "Patreon-like" platform, but with the difference of being cooperative - so, collectively owned by its artists and workers. Their main principles are: "artist owned", "transparent", "mission-driven" and "fair". Any artist can become an owner of the cooperative, and it already has more than 800 artist owners.

It functions like this: any musician can create their page and begin to post exclusive content. Their community can access this content paying USD 3.00 or more. Thus, the artists receive recurring payments. According to its transparency principle, all their data, policies and finances are available on a GitBook page. Their voting history is also available, so it is possible to consult the results of previous elections and other decisions.

The project points to the possibility of another logic for platforms, developed since their design is intended to be collectively-owned and directed towards the common good. It underlines the alternative where anyone can be an owner of a platform.

b) Guerrilla Media Collective

The collective defines itself as a "feminist translation cooperative oriented towards the common good." In order to ensure the quality of the work, each job is reviewed by a second person. It was born out of the Guerrilla Translation project, which since 2014 has striven to build common international knowledge.

Their services include jobs like translation and subtitling, revision, interpretation and social media management. Some of their projets are the translation of readings free published at the 'El Salto' journal, they coordinate editorial projects and promote a campaign regarding the commons.

This initiative has the merit of fostering our imagination of a media agency with no hierarchy, where they really care about the impact of what they're working on. It empowers radical ideas that could reshape the world in a more egalitarian and democratic version.

c) Art.coop

Is a community of cultural workers with the objective of growing the solidarity economy "by centering systems-change work led by artists and culture-bearers." It is done by studying together, connecting cultural innovators, amplifying research, and moving money to these systems.

It started with the publication of a report, commissioned by "Grantmakers in the Arts," about "the ways that arts and culture grantmakers can engage in systems-change work." On their websites, there are an infinite list of links with other content (books, courses, podcasts, etc.) for people who want to deeper understand the solidarity economy.

This project has the importance of demonstrating the possibility of a connection with other people with the sole intention of fostering solidarity. The unpretentious connection is a celebration of the cooperative ethos.

8.

WHAT ABOUT BRAZIL?

Another observation from this investigation is that there are only a few platform cooperatives in the cultural sector in Brazil. In this section, we attempt to respond to the following questions: Are there cultural platform cooperatives in Brazil? Are there cultural cooperatives that are not platformized? How can platforms suport these cooperatives? What can they learn from experiences of other countries?Why is Brazil's massive and diverse cultural production disconnected from technology, with its population consuming its Brazil-based culture on non-Brazilian platforms?

One hypothesis is that these cultural platform co-ops exist, they just aren't known yet. The Directory, created by an organization based in New York, is simply not updated with initiatives from Brazil. To confirm this hypothesis, we consulted another directory - the Map of Communicators Cooperatives ("Mapa das cooperativas de comunicadores"), created by the Platform Cooperativism Observatory ("Observatório de Cooperativas de Plataforma"), a Brazilian organization dedicated to observing and analyzing the topic. The Map presents 9 platform cooperatives in Brazil—however, none of them are in the cultural sector. There are 4 results related to journalism, 2 about marketing and publicity and 1 of technology.

From these observations, could it be said that there are no cultural platform co-ops in Brazil? With further research, we found ContratArte, an initiative from the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology from Rio Grande do Sul (IFRS). The project, led by students and professors, created an open and collaborative platform to connect artists and consumers. On the platform, artists can create their profile to introduce themselves and their work. And consumers can discover art they could like and can hire the artists directly on the platform.

It was the only platform co-op concerned with art which we could identify in Brazil. However, this signals that there are already people trying to identify and foster them in the country. What about cultural cooperatives that are not necessarily based on a platform—are there any in Brazil? Since this wasn't the primary intent of our research, we did not have enough time for an exhaustive investigation that would allow us to respond to this question completely. However, in the Platform Cooperativism Conference - Rio 2022 we had the opportunity to meet Unijazz Brasil, a music and musical education cooperative from Rio de Janeiro.

The cooperative works with the production and realization of concerts and educational events through an orchestra or individually by their members in ceremonies, business fairs and private events. Also, they teach music in schools, social projects and cooperatives with the goal of capacitating them to the job market.

These two examples we highlighted here indicate that the creation of a cultural platform co-op ecosystem is not too far from Brazil. There are already actors (individuals and organizations) demonstrating interest in creating a cultural sector based in cooperation. We hope this report can attract cooperators from all over the world to collaborate with us on this mission, and we'll keep working to enhance a free culture environment in Brazil.
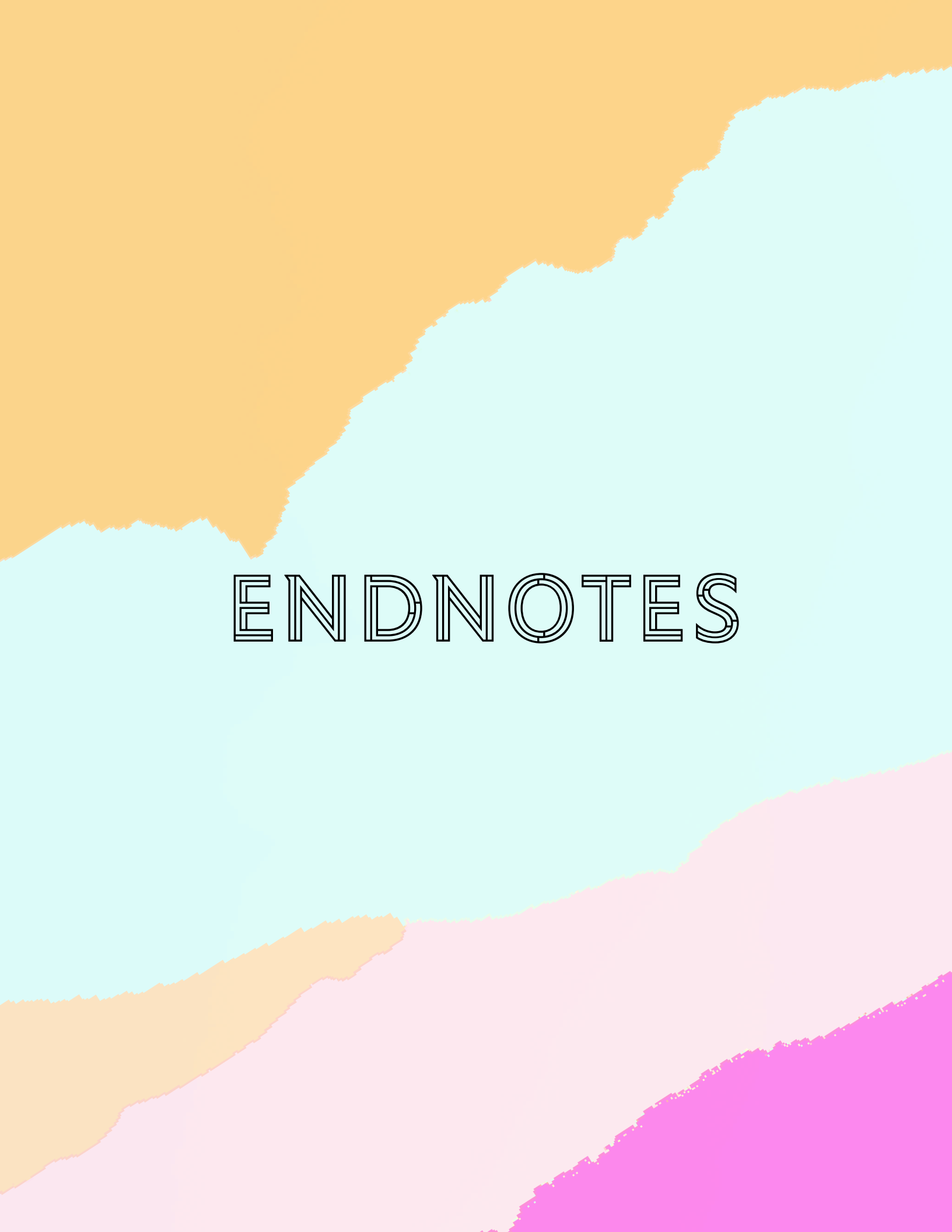
9.
CONCLUSION

In short, platformization has been consolidating itself as a new socio-technical reality in the various sectors of society. In the cultural sector, the phenomenon deepens the precariousness and individualization of artistic work, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Platform cooperativism presents itself as an alternative to a more horizontal and fair work, giving back to artists the power over their work. In order to offer better conditions to cultural workers, cooperatives must overcome the challenges and complexities of consolidating themselves as alternatives within platform capitalism. Furthermore, it is necessary that the region-specific technology and workers from the global south are centered, where the precariousness of the class is even greater.

In general, we identified that these initiatives constitute potential alternatives to the current platformization of cultural work. Although they are still in an emergency stage, the heterogeneity of these projects indicates that the cooperative model can work in different areas of the culture sector. It may be that these organizations do not come to constitute themselves as considerable competitors to capitalist platforms. Even so, their better working conditions can attract more and more artists, contribute to raising awareness of the injustices of the current mode of production, and foster the imagination of new, more democratic and egalitarian relations between technology and work.

Finally, it is possible to verify that despite their small number and geographic concentration, there are already platform cooperatives in the cultural sector that seek to connect artists and promote more democratic and egalitarian work. And considering the demand of cultural workers for support networks and greater control over their productions, cooperativism finds great potential for growth and diversification within the creative sector.

ENDNOTES

1   "Platform Coop Directory", accessed December 15, 2022, https://directory.platform.coop/.

2   "Mapa das Cooperativas de Comunicadores - Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma", accessed December 15, 2022, https://cooperativismodeplataforma.com.br/mapa/.

3   "Platform Coop Directory", accessed December 15, 2022, https://directory.platform.coop/.

4   "Mapa das Cooperativas de Comunicadores - Observatório do Cooperativismo de Plataforma", accessed December 15, 2022, https://cooperativismodeplataforma.com.br/mapa/.

5   "Owning the Future: sustainably scaling cooperatives in the digital economy", accessed December 13, 2022, https://platform.coop/events/owning-the-future-sustainably-scaling-cooperatives-in-the-digital-economy/.

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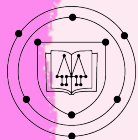
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